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SUBJECT: LESOTHO ELECTION DISPUTE: TALKS POSTPONED

REF: MASERU 269

¶1. Multi-party negotiations aimed at resolving the dispute over allocation of proportional representation seats following the 2007 snap elections were set to begin on Wednesday, August 12, 2009 (reftel). According to local media, talks have been postponed until Wednesday, August 19, 2009. In an interview a local online news service, the chief mediator, Bishop Phillip Mokuku of the Anglican Church, indicated that the reason they have agreed on postponing the negotiations was to give themselves (the heads of churches) enough time to make thorough preparations, as they will be handling critical issues which need sober minds. Bishop Mokuku said they are also planning on holding a prayer session before negotiations begin.

¶2. The Secretary General of the Basotho National Party (BNP), Dr. Molapo Majara, had a different view regarding the postponement of talks. He indicated that the meeting has been postponed because governing party delegates had indicated that they had other urgent government business to attend to. Majara said that opposition parties will patiently wait for next week to see if the negotiations will resume. However, Minister of Communications Mothejoa Metsing, who is also the governing party's Secretary General, stated that they were told that the meeting was postponed to next week but he was not aware of the reasons for postponement.

¶3. Some Local observers, together with opposition parties involved in the talks, indicated that they were not surprised with the postponement, as they know that the government 'is full of tricks'. They accused the governing party of using postponements as a strategy to delay talks in an endeavor to stalemate the entire mediation process until the next general election scheduled for 2012.

¶4. On Sunday, August, 9, Prime Minister Mosisili addressed supporters of the governing Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) in Teyateyaneng. The Prime Minister said that although his party will participate in the multi-party talks, they will not compromise on the matter of the re-allocation of PR seats. Since the re-allocation of seats is the burning issue for opposition parties, there is little hope that any progress will be made when the talks continue.

¶5. COMMENT: LCD rallies have been taking place regularly since the attempted assassination of the Prime Minister on April 22, 2009. The frequency of the rallies, which have been taking place in all ten districts of the country, has ignited speculation that the governing party may call for snap elections. The rallies are seen as a campaign tool, and opposition parties such as the All Basotho Convention (ABC) (the leading opposition party) and the BNP have been quick to hold Sunday rallies of their own across the country. According to local analysts, holding early elections may be the only solution than can bring peace and tranquility to Lesotho. Post will continue to monitor developments and provide updates.

POWER